DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 111 421 95 IR 002 514

AUTHOR Jahoda, Gerald; And Others
TITLE Instruction in Negotiating the Reference Query.
INSTITUTION Florida State Univ., Tallahassee. School of Library Science.
SPONS AGENCY Office of Education (DHEW), Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE 25 Aug 75
GRANT OEG-0-74-7307
NOTE 17p.
AVAILABLE FROM School of Library Science, Florida State University, Tallahassee, Florida 32306 (Videotape only, $50.00)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.76 HC-$1.58 Plus Postage
DESCRIPTORS Decision Making Skills; Higher Education; Information Science; Information Services; *Inquiry Training; Instructional Materials; Librarians; *Library Education; *Library Reference Services; Library Skills; Problem Solving; Professional Education; Research Methodology; Search Strategies; Unit Plan
IDENTIFIERS *Query Negotiation

ABSTRACT

An instructional module designed to help librarians learn to identify and negotiate reference questions is presented and discussed. The instructional module consists of an essay on performance of negotiation as a decision-making step in the reference process, and exercises for identification of queries that should be negotiated. A videotape which illustrates both good and poor negotiation techniques was also developed. (Author/JY)

****
* Documents acquired by ERIC include many informal unpublished *
* materials not available from other sources. ERIC makes every effort *
* to obtain the best copy available. nevertheless, items of marginal *
* reproducibility are often encountered and this affects the quality *
* of the microfiche and hardcopy reproductions ERIC makes available *
* via the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). EDRS is not *
* responsible for the quality of the original document. Reproductions *
* supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original. *
****

ED111421

INSTRUCTION IN NEGOTIATING THE REFERENCE QUERY*

by
Gerald Jahoda, Judith Braunagel, Herbert Nath, Sims Kline, and Marilyn Curtis
School of Library Science, Florida State University, Tallahassee FL 32306
August 25, 1975

ABSTRACT

Instructional material for identifying queries to be negotiated and techniques for negotiating such queries is presented and discussed. The instructional material consists of an essay on performance of negotiation as a decision making step in the reference process, exercises for identification of queries that should be negotiated, and a videotape which illustrates both good and poor negotiation techniques. This material is used in a reference course taught at the School of Library Science, Florida State University.

*Work supported with U.S. Office of Education Grant #OEG-0-74-7307

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

IR 000 514

The process of answering reference queries, as performed by librarians, is viewed as a series of decision making steps. Each of the following steps must be performed correctly in order to provide a correct answer to a query:

1. The selection of the message of the query.
2. The negotiation of the query (when this is necessary).
3. The selection of a type or types of answer-providing tools.
4. The selection of the specific answer-providing reference tools.
5. The location of the page or pages on which the answer is found.
6. The selection of the answer.

Instructional modules for each of these six decision making steps have been prepared. In this report, the instructional module for step two, query negotiation, is presented. Query negotiation should take place when the librarian suspects that a query is incomplete, ambiguous, contains inaccurate information, as well as for other reasons identified in the instructional material. Query negotiation entails both the identification of queries that require negotiation and the actual negotiation of these queries. The instructional material developed for this step of the reference process consists of an essay, exercises, and videotape. The essay and exercises are reproduced in this report. The videotape, "Query Negotiation: The Reference Interview", is available for $50.00 and may be ordered from the Instructional Media Center, Attention: C. A. Wimberly, Florida State University, Tallahassee, Florida 32306.

Instructional material for query negotiation is used in the following way. Library school students in a reference course are asked to read the attached essay and complete the appended exercises. After both the essay and exercises are reviewed by the instructor in class, the videotape of the simulated reference interviews is presented. Class discussion focuses on good as well as poor negotiating procedures illustrated in the tape, supplemented by the negotiation checklists (page 50 of the essay). Students are the assigned an out-of-class exercise in query negotiation. Each student participates in two individual negotiation practices: one in which he plays the role of "patron," and another in which he plays the role of "librarian." In the role of patron, he develops a negotiable query to ask the student-librarian, keeping a written record of the query as initially asked and the actual query that he wants answered. These student negotiations are recorded on audio-tape and critiqued by the instructor using the negotiation checklist as a guide. The student-student query negotiation is followed up with an instructor-student negotiation. In this exercise, students are given four written queries, at least one of which is to be negotiated with the instructor acting as the "patron". The student identifies the query or queries to be negotiated, negotiates such queries, and answers the negotiated queries.

Query negotiation is an important aspect of the work of reference librarians. The instructional material described in the report represents an attempt at simulating the query negotiation procedure used in libraries and identifying guidelines for effective negotiation practice.

VII. QUERY NEGOTIATION

The objectives of reference service are to answer the real query and to do so accurately, quickly, and efficiently. In this stencil we will deal with the identification of the real query. This is a key step in the reference process. To put it simply, unless we recognize and answer the patron's true query, we are not doing our job. The identification of the real query is probably the pivotal step in the reference process and one in which our professional training is put to a test. We might even suggest that once the real query has been identified, the subsequent steps in the reference process can, in many cases, be delegated to sub-professional or clerical personnel.

Why and under what circumstances are we likely to get other than the real queries? Both theoreticians and practicing reference librarians have written about this problem. Taylor suggests that a patron with an information need goes through four separate and more or less distinct stages or phases in refining and changing his information need. First there is an actual but unexpressed need for information. It's a vague feeling of uneasiness that one should know something that one doesn't know. Taylor calls this the visceral need. This is followed by a conscious description of the information need. Next, this information need is translated into a formal statement, still for oneself. Finally, the information need becomes the query posed to the reference librarian, if that route is followed. Taylor calls this the compromised need since it may be modified by what the patron thinks the librarian can do for him.[1] We should point out that the patron may not wait until the fourth stage to come to the reference desk but may do so at an

---

[1] R. S. Taylor. The process of asking questions. Am. Doc. 13:391-96 (1962).

earlier stage. Mount, a science reference librarian, gives some of the reasons why the real query may not be stated to the reference librarian. It may be because the patron does not want to reveal the real query, because he lacks knowledge of the depth and quality of the library collection, because the patron lacks confidence in the reference librarian's ability or because the person is ill at ease in posing the query or in answering questions about the query.[2] There is another problem also stated by Taylor. It is very difficult to put into words what you do not know.[3]

But getting a query that is not the real query is only one reason for query negotiation. There are other pitfalls that await the unwary reference librarian. He may receive queries that are unclear or ambiguous. He may also get queries that are stated incompletely and/or are unanswerable. These are types of queries that need to be negotiated before they can or should be answered. We might look at the different types of reference queries as a spectrum going from queries presented as complete, clear and unambiguous statements to the opposite at the other side of the spectrum. At the good part of the spectrum, the query may be stated so completely that the answer is actually given. If a patron describes exactly what he wants he may actually describe the answer to his query. At the other end of the spectrum we have queries that cannot or should not be answered as asked. In this stencil we will deal with the difficult part of the reference query spectrum.

Let us now turn to the types of queries that require negotiation before

---

[2] E. Mount. Communication barriers and the reference question. Spec. Lib. 57:575-78 (1966).

[3] R. S. Taylor. Question-negotiation and information seeking in libraries. Coll. Res. Lib. 29:178-94 (1968).

the librarian begins a search. Other types of negotiation--during and post search negotiation--will be discussed later in this stencil. The different types of negotiable queries will be discussed in terms of identifying clues (how can we recognize such queries?) and ways of getting at the real query.

The real query may not be asked.

You can never be sure whether or not the real query is being asked but when a patron asks you where copies of the Readers' Guide are located, he may well want help in finding something that he thinks is in this reference tool. The query for the location of a specific title may thus be a clue that the real query has not been asked. You might handle this query by pointing out the location of the requested reference tool and then asking whether the patron needs help in locating information in the tool. If the patron asks for help at this point, the real query can be discerned through negotiation. If he does not want help then the real query was strictly a location query.

Another clue for identifying misleading queries is the very broadly (generically) phrased query. If someone asks for books on animals, that is a clue that he may not be telling you what he actually needs from the library. In this instance, you might want to tell him that the library has more books on the subject than he is likely to be interested in and that you could be more helpful to him if he asked his query more specifically. It has been suggested by King that at this point the reference librarian engage the patron in a conversation (related to his information need) to find out more about what the patron actually wants.[4]

---

[4]G. B. King. The reference interview. RQ 12(2):157-60 (Winter, 1972).

The query takes more time than you can spend on it.

Let's say that your patron wants the names of 1975 state librarians that are women, have one child, and have obtained their library school degrees south of the Mason-Dixon line. This is a logical search statement but one that is difficult and time consuming to answer. Chances are that you cannot afford to spend the time required for answering this query. You have to negotiate it to an alternate and answerable within alloted time query. Perhaps you can provide part of the answer, e.g. a list of state librarians, with the patron completing the request himself.

Amount of information needed is not specified.

Queries for other than factual information and verification of bibliographic citations may have answers of varying sizes. For example, a query for background information might be answered with one document or with a large number of documents. A request for a bibliography on a subject may also have a wide range of number of citations as answers. When the approximate number of desired documents or citations is not specified by the patron, this should be asked in the negotiation step.

Level of answer is not specified.

Queries for other than factual information and verificiation of bibliographic citations may have different and potentially acceptable answers for patrons with different levels of training and/or interests. Requests for background information are particularly dependent on level of training. Find out whether the answer is for a specialist in the field, a specialist in another field, a layman with a good liberal education, or a layman with relatively little education. Remember to be diplomatic. All of these

this information in the negotiation stage. If you are dealing with a surrogate patron, look up the words in a dictionary or an encyclopedia.

TABLE 1

CHECKLIST FOR IDENTIFICATION OF NEGOTIABLE QUERIES

1. Is this the real query?
2. Is what is wanted specified?
3. Is subject of query recognized?
4. Is query statement unambiguous?
5. Is amount of information specified?
6. Is level of answer specified?
7. Is query answerable in time available?

DURING AND POST-SEARCH NEGOTIATION

All of the negotiations listed previously should be conducted before the start of the search. It will save time in the long run if the right query is identified from the beginning. Despite query negotiation before starting the search, the search may result in an unacceptable answer or in no answer. Also, there may be instances when too many answers are found during the course of the search. This points to the fact that negotiation may be necessary during the course of the search or when the search has been completed.

Three cases which may require during- and post-search negotiation occur when the query is not searchable at its given specificity, when the answer is not recorded in the literature, and when the query statement contains inaccuracies. It should be pointed out that while these types of negotiation commonly occur during a search or after its completion, they may also be necessary in the pre-search stages of some queries.

Query is too specific or too broad to search

A very specific query may take too much time to search, as has already been pointed out. Also, there may not be an answer to a highly specific query. Chances are that nothing is in the literature on the diets of 10-year old male white children in Somerset County, New Jersey during 1925. Such a query needs to be made more generic. Queries that are too generic, often a clue that the real query is not being asked, have to be negotiated to a more specific form by narrowing the subject, by specifying levels or types of publications, by date or by other means to come up with a useful answer.

Answer to query is not recorded in the literature

There are at least two types of queries that fall into this category: queries for confidential information and queries about future events. Trade secrets, e.g. the formula for Coca Cola, and security classified

government information, are examples of queries for confidential information. When this fact is recognized, the query should be negotiated into answerable form by, say, asking whether non-confidential information about the subject might be an acceptable alternate answer. Examples of queries about future events that require negotiation are queries for future petroleum production or consumption figures and the name of the president of AAAS several years from today. The correct answer to these queries is that we do not know. To provide full information service a librarian should attempt to negotiate these queries so that acceptable answers to alternate queries can be obtained. Queries about future events might be converted from factual answers to speculative answers (estimates and predictions).

Suspected errors in query statement

A citation the patron wants verified may be inaccurate, the name of the person about whom information is wanted may be misspelled, the person's profession, nationality, or dates may be given incorrectly. The name of an organization may also be misspelled or otherwise inaccurately reported. Past experience with what might be called surrogate patrons, e.g. secretaries asking queries for their bosses, indicates that queries from such patrons are particularly error-prone. Potentially at least, any information about the "known" aspect of the search statement may be erroneous. In some cases there may be an inaccuracy in a key term in the query about which neither the patron nor the librarian will be aware when the query is first posed. For instance, a patron may ask for information on "flouride in city water supplies" when actually he needs information on "flourine in city water supplies" but is unaware that he has given the librarian an inaccurate term. If this

inaccurate term is used as an access point, the librarian unknowingly begins the search in the wrong direction. In some cases the librarian may never recognize the error if information can be found which will seem to satisfy the query but is not precisely what the patron initially desired. Rather than giving specific directions for negotiation of errors in query statements (there aren't any), general suggestions can be given. Be somewhat skeptical about the accuracy of names, places, dates or bibliographic citations. If signs of error are suspected, alternate spellings, dates, etc. might be asked for. The patron may be able to supply related terms or synonyms for a key term in the query. Also ask the patron where he obtained his information about the query.

NEGOTIATION TECHNIQUES

The questions listed in Table 1 -- Identification of Negotiable Queries, are questions which you should ask yourself about the patron's query statement. If the answer to a numbered question is "no", it is a clue that you have identified missing information which may be essential to correctly answering the query. This missing information can then be sought through questions (negotiation).

The numbered questions aid in identifying queries which require negotiation, but in working with individual patrons you will need to rephrase the question to meet each particular situation. Remember that people vary in sensitivity to being questioned. Try to be interested, helpful without being nosy. In other words, be diplomatic.

While each patron must be treated individually, the following general techniques have been identified which can help you make the patron feel at ease and aid you in fully negotiating the query. These points are summarized

in Table 2 -- Checklist for Evaluating Negotiation.

Open and Closed Questions

King has suggested that in the initial stages of negotiation the reference librarian use open questions to encourage the patron to discuss his information needs. An open question cannot be answered with simply a "yes" or "no". Instead, the response is left up to the patron. Open questions typically begin with such words as what, when, how, who or where.

Example:

Query: "I would like some information on computers."

Negotiation Question: "What would you like to know about computers?" This open-ended question will not lead the patron, instead allowing him to further elaborate on his needs. A closed negotiation question such as "Do you want books or journal articles?" tends to prematurely restrict the patron's explanation of his request. The result may be that the librarian answers an incomplete or incorrect query.

In the final stages of negotiation, when you have learned as much as necessary about the patron's information need through asking open-ended questions, you can employ closed questions to attempt to coordinate the request with your library's organization of information. Closed questions will aid in determining such elements as the amount of information needed or the form in which the patron wants it. Closed questions are questions which may be answered with "yes" or "no", or which offer a choice between possibilities. Examples: "Would you prefer a biography?" (Yes or No); "Would you like to see an annotation or the article itself?" (Choice between possibilities).

Listening and Summarizing

In negotiation, the librarian should encourage the patron to do most of the talking and to set the direction of the preliminary discussion. Penland suggests that the librarian listen as long as possible without interrupting the patron, and try not to rush the pace of the interview.[1] Genuine listening involves not only concentrating on what is being said, but also being alert to the tone of conversation, expressions, gestures. It can also be helpful to restate the content of the patron's request. Peck suggests summarizing or paraphrasing the patron's query as a way to insure mutual understanding and to help a librarian focus upon the exact query.[2]

Nonverbal Communication

In addition to being alert to the nonverbal clues projected by the patron, you should insure that the nonverbal clues you project are positive ones. You should attempt to communicate friendliness, alertness, and interest to the patron nonverbally as well as verbally. Establishing eye contact helps to signal to the patron that you are listening to him. Nodding your head to indicate you understand what he is saying can encourage him to talk and help him to feel at ease. Your hands can also show your attention. If you stop typing but do not take your hands off the typewriter keys, or if you continue to shuffle through the catalog cards you were working with when approached, the patron feels he does not have your complete attention or that he is keeping you from more "important" tasks.

[1]P. R. Penland. The interview as communication. Library Occurrent 24 (May 1974), 422-424.

[2]T. P. Peck. Counseling skills applied to reference services. RQ 14 (Spring 1975), 233-235.

TABLE 2

CHECKLIST FOR EVALUATING NEGOTIATION

Good Negotiation	Poor Negotiation
_____ Librarian uses open questions in the initial stages of negotiation	_____ Librarian interrupts patron as he attempts to discuss his information needs
_____ Encourages patron to discuss his information needs	_____ Uses closed questions too early in the interview
_____ Summarizes or paraphrases the patron's query to insure mutual understanding	_____ Doesn't give patron full attention
_____ Makes eye contact with patron	_____ Reacts subjectively to the content of the query
_____ Gives patron full attention	_____ Is too quick to state that the query cannot be answered
_____ Remains objective about the content of the query	_____ Provides an answer to the query prematurely without thorough consideration
_____ Attempts to make patron feel at ease	_____ Places patron on the defensive
_____ Follows the patron's train of thought	_____ Exhibits uneasiness in working with patrons
_____ Shows empathy for the patron	
_____ Is aware of nonverbal clues	

Examples of Negotiation Questions

Each librarian develops an individual approach to questioning the patron in negotiation, and no one way of phrasing can be pinpointed as best for use by all librarians. The following examples illustrate possible ways of questioning a patron to clarify a query which has been identified as negotiable through use of Table 1.

Is this the real query?

"Here is the publication that you requested. May I help you to locate any particular information in it?"

Is what is wanted specified?

"I am not sure what you would like to know about this subject. What type of information would you like? This will help me in answering your query."

Is the subject of the query recognized?

"I am afraid that I am not familiar with the subject of your question. Can you help me by telling me a little bit about it?"

Ambiguity in query statement?

"There is a word in your query that may have more than one meaning. Could you tell me which meaning you have in mind?"

Amount of information specified?

"About how many publications would you like on this subject?"

Level of answer specified?

"We have publications on this subject written for different audiences. Would you like something written for a subject specialist, a layman, or perhaps someone with a special need?"

Query answerable in time available?

"I am afraid that I cannot spend as much time on your question as would be required. We can do one or two things. I can answer your question in part for you and suggest how you might complete the job. Or, we can modify your question so that it can be answered in the time available."

EXERCISE 1: Identification of Negotiable Queries

The following information requests include both negotiable and non-negotiable queries.

1. For those which you feel require negotiation, write the number of the category in Table 1, "Checklist for Identification of Negotiable Queries," which signals that negotiation is needed.
2. If there are modifiers absent (see Descriptor Checklist) which you feel are necessary to answer the query, also write the number of the missing modifier.

	Table 1 Checklist Number(s)	Modifier Number(s)	Non-Negotiable Query
Examples:			
A. I want to learn about metalorganic compounds.	2, 4, 5, 6	23, 25	
B. How many U.S. patents were issued in 1973?			X
C. Was Gerty Cori foreign?	3, 4	22, 26, 27	
1. I need a definition of Coriolis Force.			
2. Locate Rachel Carson's North with the Spring.			
3. I need some introductory information on photosynthesis.			
4. I want to find Roger Adams' article on rabbit disease.			
5. Where can I find information about home heating?			
6. Where can I find information about physics?			
7. What is the German word for electricity?			
8. What is a rudd?			
9. I need a diagram of a node.			
10. What is the equation for Boyle's Law for Gases?			

	Table 1 Checklist Numbers(s)	Modifier Number(s)	Non-Negotiable Query
11. What is the melting point of sodium chloride?			
12. Where is the Biological Abstracts?			
13. Who is the current chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission?			
14. What companies in Tallahassee sell randomizers?			
15. What was the time of sunrise in Tallahassee on 6/15/74?			
16. Where can I find information about tanks?			
17. What is a lopafour? I can't find it in any science dictionary.			
18. Do you have a journal called "Mammals and something"?			
19. I need to find an article by Reynolds on computer engineering.			
20. Expenditure on research in physics in 1979.			
21. What is the address of Joe Rosen, a professor of chemistry at the University of Michigan?			
22. List of all journal articles on fluorides.			